



Westford Conservation Trust Newsletter - Fall 2017



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President's Message

At this year's spring Town Meeting, I was surprised to hear that Westford now has **150 miles** of paved roads. I was also pleasantly surprised by a report from Trust Director Rich Strazdas that he has now GPS-mapped a total of **65 miles** of trails in Westford.

Another welcome surprise I discovered as a member of the Trust Board of Directors is that trails and trail stewardship are not the only activities the Trust is involved with. The scope of the Trust activities are spelled out in our charter. They include:

- Acquire and preserve natural resources for the benefits of Westford
- Preserve and protect historic sites
- Educate the public about the wise use of our natural resources
- Work with other organizations with similar purposes.

In this issue of the Trust Newsletter you will see some examples of all of our different activities that your

continued support as a member allows us to pursue.

Become a Member - Get a Free Trail Guide Book!

All new members that sign up by November 30th, 2017 will receive a free copy of the Trust's *Westford Trails* trail guide mailed to your home. Become a member [here](#).

Ron Gemma

Controlling Invasives in Westford - by Gerald DiBello & Ron Gemma



Mile - a - Minute

There are many common invasive plant species in Westford. [Japanese Knotweed](#), [Oriental Bittersweet](#), [Multi-Flora Rose](#), and [Autumn Olive](#) are a few examples. A less common invasive species, an invasive vine named [MAM](#) (Mile-a-Minute), was found here about 8 years ago. This year, as in years past, the Invasives Committee of the Trust has continued to lead the effort to try and manage MAM in Westford. This invasive plant can grow up to 6 inches a day and has the ability to smother out and kill native vegetation. At this time, there are four known sites in Westford where MAM has been found. If you find any of these vines on your property, please contact the Trust at invasives@westfordconservationtrust.org. This

season, a group of volunteers have concentrated their efforts at two sites: the Laughton development on Lowell Road and along the Stony and Tadmuck Brooks near Grey Fox Lane. The photo shows the MAM infestation at the Laughton property during our early control efforts in 2010; MAM was climbing trees in the background and completely covered the foreground. Many pounds of vines were harvested in those first years. In contrast, about 34.6 pounds of MAM have been harvested this season (we saw an increase this year due to heavy spring rains). The Invasives Committee plans to continue this control effort as long as MAM exists here in Westford.

Hildreth Meadow Invasive Control

The Trust recently requested and received permission from the Conservation Commission to control highly invasive plants such as Bittersweet vines, Multiflora Rose bushes and Glossy Buckthorn trees on the Trust's most recently acquired conservation land, Hildreth Meadow. The three acre former field on Hildreth Street abuts other much larger conservation parcels near Hildreth Hills. The invasive plant control will be done manually/mechanically without the use of any chemical agents. The project is planned to start this fall.

The Stone Arch Bridge Trail & The Nashua, Acton and Boston Railroad Compiled By Ellen Harde



The Stone Arch Bridge (photo shows Trail Stewards group at the bridge) is a prominent feature of the Stone Arch Bridge Trail. The trail is located on seven acres of land that was purchased by the Westford Conservation Commission from the B&M Railroad. This site was part of a railroad originally owned by the the Nashua, Acton and Boston Railroad. Below are excerpts from a number of publications regarding details about the railroad that had three station stops in Westford.



"The Nashua, Acton and Boston Railroad was opened to the public July 1, 1873." *History of Westford*, 1883, pg 347 By Edwin R. Hodgman

"... it passed through Westford from north to south, coming down along Massapoag Pond [in Dunstable] paralleling West Street and passing beside St. Catherine's Church. The line crossed over the Stony Brook Railroad and Stony Brook on impressive stone arch bridges. It continued southerly on alternate high fills and cuts to pass under Forge Village Road, Patten Road at Pine Ridge, across Concord and Howard Roads to Littleton Road (Route 110), passed under Snake Road [Powers Road] near [what is today] the Nashoba Valley Ski area and ran in a straight line to North Acton. Three stations were provided to serve the community: West Graniteville, near St. Catherine's Church, Pine Ridge (originally called Westford, but changed after the B&M takeover.) (Photo above) and East Littleton (photo below), near Littleton Road." - H. Arnold Wilder, 2002, as cited in *Westford Recollections of Days Gone By*, by June Kennedy



"When the line opened in July 1873, the NA&B made a bold bid for Nashua-Boston traffic... Despite this strong effort, the Nashua, Acton and Boston never enjoyed success. It became part of the Boston & Maine in 1895.

Through freight service ended and the sparsely populated territory through which the line passed generated little revenue. Before June 1921 both a daily round trip passenger train and a daily mixed freight were operated between Nashua and North Acton. Passenger receipts averaged only \$2.65 per trip!

The passenger train made its last run June 7, 1921; the mixed train lasted until June 23, 1924. By 1924, ... B&M sought permission to abandon the line... The tracks... were removed the summer of 1926.

"Today much of the right of way through Dunstable and Westford remains clearly visible. Older residents refer to the line locally as the "Red Line" supposedly on account of its heavy operating losses. Its most notable artifact is a stone bridge across Stony Brook located some 1200 feet southeast of the intersection of West and Prescott Streets in Westford and accessible by an easy hike. Built of granite blocks without mortar, this has rightfully been called "the most impressive stone arch structure in the lower Merrimack Valley." (Peter M. Molloy, *Lower Merrimack Valley*, p. 105, 1976)

- *The Rail Lines of Southern New England* c. 1995 by Roland Dale Kerr

"The arch spans sixty-five feet and is more than twenty-five feet thick. Granite stones used in the bridge and its massive wing abutments were cut at a local [Graniteville] quarry. The huge gray blocks were hauled to the site by twenty yoke of oxen.

"Irish laborers spent months on this prodigious project, using little more than their hands to build this imposing

structure. The construction of a keystone arch requires a temporary wooden structure be built to hold the stones in place until the keystone - the central wedge-shaped stone that locks all the parts together - is put into place. No mortar or metal reinforcement was used in the construction.”

- *adventurides.com*

“This was also known as the RED LINE because the rails rusted up from the small amount of travel over them. The Pine Ridge station [section house and freight house] was moved to the west side of Forge Village Road down to the corner of Cold Spring Road and Forge Village Road. It was used as a home by Edward Green [56 Forge Village Road].”

- *Westford Railroads*, 1995 by Elwin Bagley

**Do Turtles Lay Eggs At The Same Time
and Place Every Year?**
By Rich Strazdas



Plants and animals, us included, follow diurnal, monthly, and yearly cycles. We fall asleep about the same time every day. Half of us experience menses. And we all look forward to birthdays, holidays and the changing seasons. Of course, we rely on clocks and calendars. Millennia ago, we observed the sun, moon, and the visibility of major stars to approximate the same information. What do animals do, without the internet?

I began thinking about this when I had the good fortune to observe a snapping turtle, *Chelydra serpentina*, digging in my vegetable garden in June in two consecutive years. A picture tells a thousand words, and sure enough, it was the same turtle. More amazingly, she came on June 16 last year (first photo), and June 17 this year. Why do they do this, and how do they do this?

Herpetologists have found that the nesting

**Pageant Field Stone Wall Restoration -
Update**
By Lenny Palmer



The Pageant Field (named after the 200th Town Anniversary pageant held there in 1929) stone wall restoration project

is beginning to take shape. The 1500 foot wall runs along the field at the Prospect Hill Wildlife Sanctuary on Hildreth Street. At the spring Town Meeting CPA funds were allocated to the Trust to restore the historic wall that has fallen into disrepair. An unrestored section of the wall is shown in the photo on the left. Dave Tibbetts of New England Land Design is the stone mason who has the contract to make the wall as much like the original as possible. This past summer the Trust eradicated the poison ivy on the wall and on either side to make it possible for Dave to get started. Some replacement stones have been delivered and soon the vegetation on the field side will be trimmed to allow access to the wall. Dave will do much of the work from the field side to avoid working on Hildreth St. He intends to begin the rebuilding this fall and work through the winter, weather permitting.

season for snapping turtles is less than one month. Most species return to the same area, although they lay their clutch in a different place. Timing can shift by a few days depending on rain and temperature. They prefer loam, with partial sun. My garden, cultivated in April, must seem pretty ideal. Since snapping turtles lay eggs only once per year, I'll know when to look in 2018.

My sightings were both close to the summer solstice, so I suspect that the turtle notices the lengthening daylight gradually approaching its maximum. This year was much wetter than last year, so rainfall can't be a major factor.

Eggs typically hatch sometime between late August and early October. I observed no evidence of hatching last year, and this year I watched the digging more frequently and saw no evidence of laying. A clutch is typically 15 to 50 eggs. This female is certainly large enough to be sexually mature, so maybe my observational skills are lacking. In any case, practice makes perfect!

The Turtle Rescue League encourages gardeners to leave an unplanted bed for turtles to discover. The edges of my garden are left for later flower planting, so I was unwittingly following their advice. You never know what you'll see in your own backyard. Just watch and learn!

Fall/Winter 2017 Hike Schedule

Join Westford Conservation Trust members on our monthly hikes! All hikes are free and no sign-up is required. For more details on each hike, please visit our [website](#).

Saturday, October 14 - Cider Mill Pond
Time: 9:00 am – 10:30 am

Take a fall hike on the Cider Mill Pond Trail led by Westford Conservation Trust Board Member

Devil's Walking Stick

By Bill Harman



It was several years ago when I first felt the sharp thorns of a [Devil's Walking Stick](#) (photo on left). I was among a group of

explorers planning a possible trail in the new town Conservation Land abutting the Laughton subdivision (Providence Road and Lowell Road). We were walking along a small brook where, because of the sloping ground, it was natural to hold onto trees for balance and support. We soon found out that most of the "Devil's Walking Stick" trees in this area had small, sharp spikes all over. It was impossible to use any of these trees for balance.



We did, however, find an excellent route for a trail, and over the years the Devil's Walking Stick Trail (pictured) has been trimmed and marked. There is a trailhead on Providence

Road, marked with a TRAIL sign. There is just barely room to park 2 or 3 cars along Providence Road at the trailhead.

This Conservation Land is also one of the few places in Westford where Mile-a-Minute (MAM) vines have been found. It seems likely that the origin of the MAM seeds was in hay bales used during the construction of the subdivision. A major systematic MAM control project has focused on these particular locations. The improvements are dramatic, and in the summer of 2017, the number of MAM plants is only a tiny fraction of what it was.

I was walking along that brook recently looking

Lenny Palmer. We will stop at the top of Little Tadmuck Hill, check out the continuing advance of the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid that is slowly killing the hemlocks, and examine the "Indian Grinding Stone", with a discussion of what caused this interesting hole in the granite.

- Wear sturdy footwear appropriate to the weather.
- **Park** along Rome Drive near the [trail marker](#).
- Sociable dogs on leash are welcome.
- For further information, call Lenny at 978-392-9876.

Saturday, November 4 TBD

Time: 9:00 am - 10:30 am

*Check our website/Facebook page for more information closer to the date of this event.

Saturday, December 2 - Jarvis Way Trail Loop

Time: 9:00 am - 10:30 am

Take a late fall hike on trails near [Griffin Road](#) with Trust Director Rich Strazdas. We will explore the loop around Jarvis Way and, if time permits, go east toward the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail until we reach the large blowdown field, and then explore the trails from the end of Polar Bear Drive.

- Wear sturdy footwear appropriate for the weather.
- **Park** along [Jarvis Way](#) by the trail marker between #7 and #13 (Google erroneously insists it's #17).
- Sociable dogs on leash are welcome.
- For further information, call Rich at 978-692-2057.

for MAM plants. I was not on the trail when I mistakenly touched one of the Devil's Walking Stick trees. I was reminded instantly about the spikes and I moved on carefully. That area happened to be especially infested with Oriental Bittersweet which, like MAM, is another invasive species, but much too widespread to be eradicated. Soon I came to an area where Japanese Knotweed (another problem invasive species) was plentiful. Moving forward I came to a place where these two invasive species were competing directly. I came into a dark area, like being in a tent where no sunshine gets in, when I realized that the darkness was caused by the broad leaves overhead of many tall Japanese Knotweed plants, taking all of the sunlight. Evidently Japanese Knotweed had figured a way to win the battle with MAM.

Correction

A link to an article in the Spring 2017 newsletter titled *Westford Trails are Everywhere* referred to an online view of the trails in Westford. A link to this Google-enabled map is [here](#).



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